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SUBJECT: VIETNAM VIEWS ON NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT SUMMIT

REF: Kuala Lumpur 1080 and previous

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: From the GVN's perspective, the recently concluded Non-Aligned Movement summit in Kuala Lumpur demonstrated that NAM continues to "revitalize and unify." While NAM came out strongly against a war on Iraq, Vietnamese officials did not view the conference as "anti-American." President Tran Duc Luong, who led the GVN delegation, conferred with numerous leaders during the summit. Vietnam was pleased with the emphasis on "south to south" cooperation, and plans to take a "more active" role in NAM. END SUMMARY

NAM "MORE RELEVANT"

2. (SBU) Le Hoai Trung, Deputy Director for the MFA's International Organizations Department (MFA/IO), met with poloff on March 3 to discuss Vietnam's perspective on the 13th NAM summit held in Kuala Lumpur February 25-26. Trung was part of the GVN delegation. (Biographic Note: Trung was graduated from the MFA's Institute of International Relations, has an MA from the Fletcher School, and served three tours in Vietnam's Mission to the U.N. End Note).

3. (SBU) Trung said that the GVN delegation came away from the summit "very impressed" that NAM appeared "more unified and more relevant" in a "very complicated world situation." He opined that the summit's focus on "strengthening security and political independence" was "quite appropriate," especially regarding timely issues such as Iraq, Palestine-Israel, and the Korean Peninsula. Trung, who also attended the last NAM summit five years ago, claimed that this summit was "less contentious," likely due to greater consensus over the "tense and complicated" world security situation.

ANTI-WAR, NOT ANTI-AMERICAN

4. (SBU) Trung noted that President Luong had stressed in his remarks that during this "difficult period" it is "especially important" to demonstrate NAM's "unity against war." Trung emphasized that, from the GVN's perspective, the strong stand against war should not be viewed as "anti-American" per se. He admitted that some speeches "could be construed as "anti-American," but claimed that, since NAM works on a consensus basis, the final document was "relatively moderate." Trung also admitted, however, that "some" participants viewed the US actions (current or planned) concerning Iraq "if not anti-Muslim, then a form of discrimination, considering what is going on in the Korean Peninsula and Palestine." Some members also feel "insecure and nervous," he added. Trung noted that the general theme of settling the Iraq issue "peacefully and within the UN framework" was one with which Vietnam agrees and has repeatedly stated publicly and privately.

"POSITIVE" MEETINGS WITH WORLD LEADERS

5. (SBU) Over the course of the two-day summit, President Luong held separate bilateral meetings with 15 heads of state, according to Trung and press reports. Most were relatively short, "sideline" meetings, but Trung highlighted several deliverables from these talks:
--the opening of a Vietnamese embassy in Bangladesh;
--Namibia's attendance at a conference on Vietnam-Africa cooperation scheduled for late May in Hanoi;
--continuation of rice exports to Indonesia and progress on settlement of overlapping claims on the continental shelf;
and,
--boosting trade with Iran.

CAN VIETNAM HELP?

6. (SBU) Trung said that due to the "complicated" world situation, economics took a back seat to the political

issues, but the GVN was "gratified" to see that there was more discussion on "south to south" cooperation. In addition, there was discussion about "triangular assistance," a method Vietnam has applied to assisting Benin, Madagascar, Senegal, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Under this scheme, Vietnam provides some expertise (normally in rice production) along with contributions from the host government and UN and/or NGO assistance. Trung said African nations "very much appreciate" Vietnam's technical assistance. He added that these efforts fit well with Vietnam's goal to increase its presence in Africa, with the understanding that Vietnam does not have the capability to be an Official Development Assistance donor. Some foreign officials told Trung that the "triangular assistance" model could be useful as a vehicle for additional "south to south" cooperation.

VIETNAM LOOKING FOR A LARGER ROLE

17. (SBU) Trung claimed that Vietnam's status within the NAM appeared to have improved over the past five years, likely due to Vietnam's outreach efforts and to its own developing economy and "impressive" growth rate. As further evidence of the country's rising stature among NAM members, Vietnam was elected as one of the NAM summit's 25 vice chairs, he noted. Trung predicted that Vietnam would continue its efforts "to make further contributions to the organization, without taking on a leadership role."

18. (SBU) Separately, Professor Nguyen Thi Thanh Thuy, Deputy Dean of Hanoi National University's Faculty of International Studies, opined that, while the NAM remains a useful organization for Vietnam, it is "very large and complicated, and members' interests change over time." She predicted that ASEAN would remain more important to Vietnam's overall interests.
BURGHARDT